

Genesis 21:8-21 New Living Translation (NLT)

8 When Isaac grew up and was about to be weaned, Abraham prepared a huge feast to celebrate the occasion. **9** But Sarah saw Ishmael—the son of Abraham and her Egyptian servant Hagar—making fun of her son, Isaac. **10** So she turned to Abraham and demanded, *“Get rid of that slave woman and her son. He is not going to share the inheritance with my son, Isaac. I won’t have it!”*

11 This upset Abraham very much because Ishmael was his son. **12** But God told Abraham, *“Do not be upset over the boy and your servant. Do whatever Sarah tells you, for Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted. **13** But I will also make a nation of the descendants of Hagar’s son because he is your son, too.”*

14 So Abraham got up early the next morning, prepared food and a container of water, and strapped them on Hagar’s shoulders. Then he sent her away with their son, and she wandered aimlessly in the wilderness of Beersheba.

15 When the water was gone, she put the boy in the shade of a bush. **16** Then she went and sat down by herself about a hundred yards away. *“I don’t want to watch the boy die,”* she said, as she burst into tears.

17 But God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, *“Hagar, what’s wrong? Do not be afraid! God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. **18** Go to him and comfort him, for I will make a great nation from his descendants.”*

19 Then God opened Hagar’s eyes, and she saw a well full of water. She quickly filled her water container and gave the boy a drink.

20 And God was with the boy as he grew up in the wilderness. He became a skillful archer, **21** and he settled in the wilderness of Paran. His mother arranged for him to marry a woman from the land of Egypt.

Leader: The Word of God for the People of God.

People: Thanks be to God.

“Be Not Afraid!”

6.25.17

Last week we heard the story of Abraham and Sarah. And we were challenged with the question: *“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”*

Many years after the days of Noah and the Flood, God was looking for another righteous person. Eventually, God called a man named Abram. (“The Bible Story,” Arthur Maxwell, © 1975, Review and Herald Publishing Association; volume 1, Part IV; story 1 “God Finds a Boy,” pp. 133-137)

“A dweller in the ancient city of Ur, later called Babylon, and known today as Iraq...” Abram was singled out by the One True God to *“leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.”* (Gen 12.1) In essence, Abram was told to: *“leave everything you know and love, settle among*

strangers.” *“Leave your comfortable and familiar space, go and live among total strangers in a completely new culture.”*

Amazingly enough, “Abram obeys the call of God, believing God’s promise that he will become the father of many people, and that through these descendants ‘all families on earth will be blessed.’” (Gen 12.3) (Guideposts, KNOW the BIBLE in 30 Days: Discovering Historical Facts, Biblical Insights and the Inspiring Power of God’s Word, J. Stephen Lang, © 2008 J. Stephen Lang; Section One “Beginnings”; Day 2 “Making a Chosen People” Abraham and Sons; pp. 15-31)

So, at age 75, Abram and his wife headed to the Promised Land. (“The Bible Story,” Arthur Maxwell, © 1975, Review and Herald Publishing Association; volume 1, Part IV; story 2 “All Aboard for Canaan.” pp. 138-141)

When God seemed silent and there was no sign of any descendants, Abram became concerned. *No kids in sight.* (“The Bible Story,” Arthur Maxwell, © 1975, Review and Herald Publishing Association; volume 1, Part IV; story 6 “Children Like the Stars.” pp. 155-158)

When it seemed that Sarah’s barrenness was not going to end, Sarah devised a plan for an heir for Abram. Her servant girl, Hagar. What a great idea! Right? NOT!

Once Hagar became pregnant, there is some serious jealousy going on.

Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time. After all, it was not uncommon for barren wives to give a handmaid to her husband. The resulting child would be considered the child of the real wife, and not the servant girl.

But for whatever reason, it was too much for Sarai to handle.

Hagar’s contempt for Sarah’s barrenness, and Sarah’s own insecurities led to deep jealousy and anger and wrath.

Interestingly enough, Sarah blames her husband.

“Look what you have done! You have ruined everything!”

“But,” Abram pleads, “it was YOUR idea!” “Nevertheless” he continued, “she is your servant. Do with her what you want!”

So, Sarah abused her terribly. Horribly. harshly. She abused her. Taunted her. Verbally attacked her.

Emotionally damaged her. [well, we don’t really know what she did, but] It got so bad, that Hagar the Horribly Treated surrogate Mother fled. She ran away. She had had enough!

She said: *‘I’m outta’ here!’* (Interpreter’s Bible, Genesis - Exodus, © 1952 Pierce and Smith; Vol 1; (pp. 636-640)

Hagar fled when she could not handle the bitterness and anger from Sarai. But the angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water.

“What are you doing here? Go back to your mistress. Submit to her. Do as she tells you. I will give you many descendants. You will bear a son and call him ‘Ishmael.’ because the Lord has heard your cries.”

(Ishmael means “God hears.”) (Interpreter’s Bible, Genesis - Exodus, © 1952 Pierce and Smith; Vol 1; (pp. 636-640)

So Hagar returned to her home with Abram and Sarai. While there, she delivered a baby boy and named him Ishmael.

Abram was so proud of his son. He had become a father. At last, the promise had been fulfilled! Or had it?

Things were going so well... But then everything changed.

When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord spoke to him again. The promise he heard 25 years earlier, of “*many descendants*” and being the “*father of many nations*” was still alive. And Ishmael (Abram’s son) was NOT to be the Child of Promise, through whom the multitude of nations would come.

The promise was clear: Sarai would actually bear a son.

Then, both Abram and Sarai underwent name changes: Abraham (father of many) and Sarah (Princess). This gave them both a new lot on life.

They would finally have a child somehow - well into their advanced years. (Genesis 17.1-2, 4,15-17; 18.9-15) ("The Bible Story," Arthur Maxwell, © 1975, Review and Herald Publishing Association; volume 1, Part IV; story 7 "Sarah Laughs Too Soon." pp. 159-161)

Just as the Lord promised, Sarah became pregnant and gave birth to a little boy. He was named Isaac (laughter) since the news of his birth brought laughter to both of his parents, as well as all of the neighbors.

At long last, the child of promise had appeared. (Genesis 21.1-7)

Again all was well! Right? well...

When Isaac was about 3, his father Abraham threw a big party, celebrating his weaning.

When Sarah saw the boys playing together, she became jealous.

According to some translations, this playing may have been more like "laughing" or even "mocking."

This angered Sarah so much that she immediately told her husband to *"get rid of that servant girl and her son (Ishmael)!"*

"After all," she said, "I don't want HER son to share the inheritance with MY boy!"

She did not want her son to have to share the inheritance with his half-brother.

Abraham is dismayed by this request as Ishmael is also his son.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where there was NO good choice?

Having been reassured by God that Ishmael will be the father of a great nation, Abraham agrees and sends them away. (Interpreter's Bible, Genesis - Exodus, © 1952 Pierce and Smith; Vol 1; (pp. 636-640)

So, early in the morning, Abraham packs a little snack and some water bottles and sends them on their way. Out in the hot wilderness, the water soon runs out. By this time, Hagar feels horrible about what is about to happen to her son. So she places him under a bush and walks away, unable to bear the thought of him dying.

When the boy cries out, God hears. And sends an angel to Hagar. *"Fear not, God has heard the boy's cries. Take your son, for I will make him a great nation."*

And suddenly, her eyes are opened and she sees a well of water. She quickly fills her bottles with water and offers it to her son.

And God was with the boy. He grew up and lived in the wilderness. (Interpreter's Bible, Genesis - Exodus, © 1952 Pierce and Smith; Vol 1; (pp. 636-640)

This parting with Ishmael had to be difficult on Abraham. After all, this was his oldest son. And both Hagar and Ishmael lived with Abraham and Sarah for all those years.

(Genesis 21.8-21) ("The Bible Story," Arthur Maxwell, © 1975, Review and Herald Publishing Association; volume 1, Part IV; story 9 "Love's Greatest Test." pp. 168-176)

Be Not Afraid

This story is a reminder of God's promise to be with us always, no matter what. Even if we are an outcast, a child of a slave, a slave, or someone who does not really believe in the God Who promises to be with us.

Be not afraid. God is with us.

When have you wondered if God was with you?

Maybe you have been seeking direction but have not really had a clear answer...

Maybe you feel trapped in a relationship or a job you really need to escape...

Maybe you have been deeply hurt by someone... maybe even the church....

Maybe you are drowning in debt and see no way out...

Maybe you have been abused, hurt, left by the wayside, reeling in pain...

Maybe you are searching for meaning and purpose in your life...

Maybe you have questions that seem to have no answer...

Maybe you have been praying desperately and continue to wait...

Friends, no matter where you are in life, God is with you!

Some, who leave or are kicked out of homes, relationships, jobs, churches, communities, hoping for a better life, may leave with nothing and may discover the "better life" is not actually waiting for them. They may leave a horrible situation of abuse only to find themselves with absolutely no support: no food, no money, no job, no support system.

But, as Dawn Chesser suggests: "When things get chaotic, jumbled, and messy, look for signs of God. God is always present with us, no matter how hard the going gets." (Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

Douglas E. Wingeier reminds us:

"... God is with us. And ... although God is present, difficult times **still** come our way. We get thrown into chaos over and over. The hard truth is: *God does not always prevent people from doing things that are wrong.*"

NOR does "... God ... prevent **us** from acting in ways that are harmful for others.

But "The good news is, **God is with us**, even when we do not act in Christlike ways toward our sisters and brothers. God is with us," challenging us to **wrestle with** "the really hard questions, admit to our sins, own up to our mistakes, turn our lives around, and head in a new direction." (Douglas E. Wingeier in *Keeping Holy Time: Studying the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A*; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001, pp.232-233)

Friends... God is with us.

IWW can we bring hope and joy to those who are outcasts? To those who feel all alone? To those who have nothing: no food, no home, no support system?

See who God sees. Hear who God hears.

Be Not Afraid. God is with us.

Hagar, the young servant girl, only did as she was instructed by Sarah. She was not an adulteress or seductress or a villain in this story. It was Sarah's idea to have Abraham have a child with Hagar. She thought this was her only chance to carry on the family line. Unfortunately, her jealousy got the best of her.

Later this decision - this lapse in judgment - would come back to bite her - in the form of fierce jealousy and rage. This anger and bitterness has continued through many generations. Even to this day.

And yet, God was with Hagar, Ishmael and even the Arab nations.

Be Not Afraid. God is with us.

No matter who we are, or what we've done, God is with us.